

WRIGHT,

Richard Nathaniel

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WRIGHT, R. E.

WRIGHT, RICHARD MATTHEWIEL
Apartment 3F
82 Washington Place
New York, New York (Res.)
Free-lance writer

NATIVE BORN
Race
Date of Birth
Place of Birth

COMMUNIST
negro
9/4/08
Natchez, Miss.

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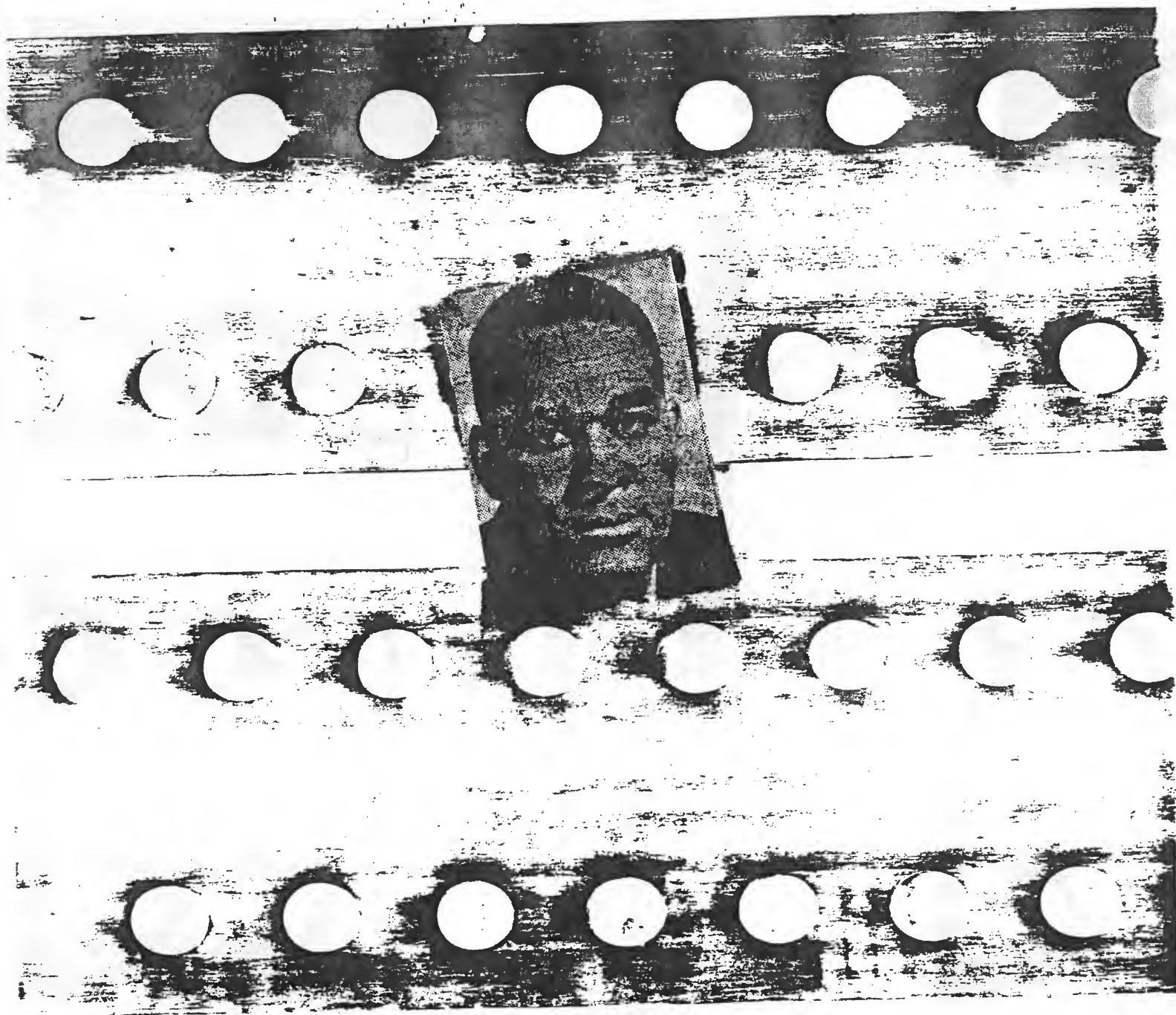
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RICHARD WRIGHT

WRIGHT, R. 4

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WRIGHT, R. 5

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Apology

We are sorry if you meet with difficulties in getting Parliament cigarettes. We are making as many as ever, all that our machines will properly produce. But we can neither make enough to meet the growing demand nor get additional manufacturing equipment at this time. So please bear with us—and with your dealer too. He's as anxious to supply you as we are.



Benson & Hedges

FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK

WALSH R. 7

spite of his bad ear. His attitude has completely changed. He is a cheerful, friendly, hard-working boy.

What is the central fact in the correcting of criminals? Is it not that the criminal decides whether he will try to reform or not? It is his decision, not ours. If he does not want to try, if he will make no effort to redeem himself, he stays unredeemed and unrehabilitated. However favorable may be the opportunities we provide, he may refuse to take them. It is the old problem of taking a horse to water.

Therefore it is our job, so far as we can, to stimulate him to try, to treat him in a way which is calculated to make him try. So far as we can, we must avoid doing things which will weaken his resolution or rouse his opposition.

According to the American Law Institute, criminals should be treated primarily as patients in need of therapy. The following statement is substantially the proposition which the Youth Correction Authority makes to the criminal:—

"You have committed a crime and are in trouble. We will help you. Your crime is due to some emotional maladjustment or conflict. We will study you to find out what it is. We will prescribe treatment for you. We will determine when you have been cured. We will parole or discharge you when we decide it is safe to do so.

"You must understand that we are not punishing you. We are giving you therapeutic treatment. We are dealing with the causes of behavior — not with the behavior itself. And since everyone is different and the treatment applied to each person is individually designed to cure his weaknesses, you must not compare the treatment you get with that which another person receives and think he is being treated more or less favorably than you are. Nor should you feel, because you have performed your work as well as the man with whom you have been working, that if he is discharged from custody, you also ought to be discharged from custody. You must rely on our judgment. We have to measure your characteristics. We may find in you a dangerous quality; and even if you do everything perfectly which we require of you, you may still need a long course of treatment to overcome it."

What would be the answer?

"That's not good enough. I have lost my liberty and I want to get it back. But you promise me nothing. You tell me that even if I do everything exactly as you require, you may still hold out on me. You say that you may let my partner go home, but may keep me indefinitely, even if I have done as well as he has or better. Why should I try?"

Would it not be better if the Correction Authority should say this:—

"You have shown that you are unable or unwilling to obey the rules of the community. You have forfeited your right to be a free man. But we will give you a chance to earn your freedom again; and if you earn it, you will get it. We give you our word on that.

"This is what you have to do: There are ten courses available for you to take. You can take any one of them; and if you pass it successfully, you go free. The courses provide training in different trades and professions. People's abilities and aptitudes vary greatly and that is the reason we give a variety of courses. Almost anybody should find one that will suit him. But although the subject matter is different, the social strains in each course are equal. To complete it successfully you must show that you have learned how to live with other people. Your temper will be severely tested, temptations will appear unexpectedly, you will be driven to the limit of your endurance. These are not attempts to catch you. They are tests. They are part of your training, like live ammunition in the tests for the Army and the Navy.

"We want you to learn self-control, to be ready for anything that is likely to occur in the ordinary conditions of life; and before you can be free, you must make the grade just as an airplane pilot must make the grade before he gets his wings, or a medical student before he can practice medicine. But this we promise you. If you make the grade, you go free. You will be measured by what you do, by your conduct, by the way you stand up under pressure. So long as you have done the work up to the required standard, you shall go free. It is our job to make our tests sufficiently searching to detect your weaknesses.

"As to which course you take, that is your choice. We will give you an aptitude test and the best advice we can. But you are free to choose. We will give you any help in our power. If you are ill, you will get good care in the hospital. If you are disturbed, there is a psychiatrist to whom you can go if you want. If you get mixed up in your work, any one of the instructors will be glad to give you personal tutoring to straighten you out. And the pastor is truly your friend. He is always there for you to go to.

"But remember this: Your freedom depends on yourself, on your taking the opportunity we are giving you, on the way you do the work. We can give you the chance, but you must do the job. You are the master of your fate. Now it's up to you."

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manner. He suffered from asthma and would snort at unexpected intervals. Now and then he would punctuate his flow of words by taking a nip from a bottle of whiskey. He had traveled half around the world and his talk was pitted with vague allusions to European cities. I met him in his apartment, listened to him intently, observed him minutely, for I knew that I was facing one of the leaders of World Communism.

"Hello, Wright," he snorted. "I've heard about you."

As we shook hands he burst into a loud, seemingly causeless laugh; and as he guffawed I could not tell whether his mirth was directed at me or was meant to hide his uneasiness.

"I hope what you've heard about me is good," I parried.

"Sit down," he laughed again, waving me to a chair. "Yes, they tell me you write."

"I try to," I said.

"You can write," he snorted. "I read that article you wrote for the *New Masses* about Joe Louis. Good stuff. First political treatment of sports we've yet had. Ha-ha."

I waited. I had thought that I should encounter a man of ideas, but he was not that. Then perhaps he was a man of action? But that was not indicated either.

"They tell me that you are a friend of Ross," he shot at me.

I paused before answering. He had not asked me directly, but had hinted in a neutral, teasing way. Ross, I had been told, was slated for expulsion from the party on the ground that he was "anti-leadership"; and if a member of the Communist International was asking me if I was a friend of a man about to be expelled, he was indirectly asking me if I was loyal or not.

"Ross is not particularly a friend of mine," I said frankly. "But I know him well; in fact, quite well."

"If he isn't your friend, how do you happen to know him so well?" he asked, laughing to soften the hard threat of his question.

"I was writing an account of his life and I know him as well, perhaps, as anybody," I told him.

"I heard about that," he said. "Wright. Ha-ha. Say, let me call you Dick, hunh?"

"Go ahead," I said.

"Dick," he said, "Ross is a nationalist." He paused to let the weight of his accusation sink in. He meant that Ross's militancy was extreme. "We Communists don't dramatize Negro nationalism," he said in a voice that laughed, accused, and drawled.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"We're not advertising Ross." He spoke directly now.

"We're talking about two different things," I said. "You seem worried about my making Ross popular because he is your political opponent. But I'm not concerned about Ross's politics at all. The man struck me as one who typified certain traits of the Negro migrant. I've already sold a story based upon an incident in his life."

Nealson became excited.

"What was the incident?" he asked.

"Some trouble he got into when he was thirteen years old," I said.

"Oh, I thought it was political," he said, shrugging.

"But I'm telling you that you are wrong about that," I explained. "I'm not trying to fight you with my writing. I've no political ambitions. You must believe that. I'm trying to depict Negro life."

"Have you finished writing about Ross?"

"No," I said. "I dropped the idea. Our party members were suspicious of me and were afraid to talk." He laughed.

"Dick," he began, "we're short of forces. We're facing a grave crisis."

"The party's always facing a crisis," I said.

His smile left and he stared at me.

"You're not cynical, are you, Dick?" he asked.

"No," I said. "But it's the truth. Each week, each month there's a crisis."

"You're a funny guy," he said, laughing, snorting again. "But we've got a job to do. We're altering our work. Fascism's the danger, the danger now to all people."

"I understand," I said.

"We've got to defeat the Fascists," he said, snorting from asthma. "We've discussed you and know your abilities. We want you to work with us. We've got to crash out of our narrow way of working and get our message to the church people, students, club people, professionals, middle class."

"I've been called names," I said softly. "Is that crashing out of the narrow way?"

"Forget that," he said.

He had not denied the name-calling. That meant that, if I did not obey him, the name-calling would begin again.

"I don't know if I fit into things," I said openly.

"We want to trust you with an important assignment," he said.

"What do you want me to do?"

"We want you to organize a committee against the high cost of living."

"The high cost of living?" I exclaimed. "What do I know about such things?"

I TRIED TO BE A COMMUNIST

by RICHARD WRIGHT

9

WITH the John Reed clubs now dissolved, I was free of all party relations. I avoided unit meetings for fear of being subjected to discipline. Occasionally a Negro Communist — defying the code that enjoined him to shun suspect elements — came to my home and informed me of the current charges that Communists were bringing against one another. To my astonishment I heard that Buddy Neelson had branded me a “smuggler of reaction.”

Buddy Neelson was the Negro who had formulated the Communist position for the American Negro; he had made speeches in the Kremlin; he had spoken before Stalin himself.

“Why does Neelson call me that?” I asked.

“He says that you are a petty bourgeois degenerate,” I was told.

“What does that mean?”

“He says that you are corrupting the party with your ideas.”

“How?”

There was no answer. I decided that my relationship with the party was about over; I should have to leave it. The attacks were growing worse, and my refusal to react incited Neelson into coining more absurd phrases. I was termed a “bastard intellectual,” an “incipient Trotskyite”; it was claimed that I possessed an “anti-leadership attitude” and that I was manifesting “seraphim tendencies” — a phrase meaning that one has withdrawn from the struggle of life and considers oneself infallible.

Working all day and writing half the night brought me down with a severe chest ailment. While I was ill, a knock came at my door one morning. My

mother admitted Ed Green, the man who had demanded to know what use I planned to make of the material I was collecting from the comrades. I stared at him as I lay abed and I knew that he considered me a clever and sworn enemy of the party. Bitterness welled up in me.

“What do you want?” I asked bluntly. “You see I’m ill.”

“I have a message from the party for you,” he said.

I had not said good day, and he had not offered to say it. He had not smiled, and neither had I. He looked curiously at my bleak room.

“This is the home of a bastard intellectual,” I cut at him.

He stared without blinking. I could not endure his standing there so stone-like. Common decency made me say, “Sit down.”

His shoulders stiffened.

“I’m in a hurry.” He spoke like an army officer.

“What do you want to tell me?”

“Do you know Buddy Neelson?” he asked.

I was suspicious. Was this a political trap?

“What about Buddy Neelson?” I asked, committing myself to nothing until I knew the kind of reality I was grappling with.

“He wants to see you,” Ed Green said.

“What about?” I asked, still suspicious.

“He wants to talk with you about your party work,” he said.

“I’m ill and can’t see him until I’m well,” I said.

Ed Green stood for a fraction of a second, then turned on his heel and marched out of the room.

When my chest healed, I sought an appointment with Buddy Neelson. He was a short, black man with an ever ready smile, thick lips, a furtive manner, and a greasy, sweaty look. His bearing was nervous, self-conscious; he seemed always to be hiding some deep irritation. He spoke in short, jerky sentences, hopping nimbly from thought to thought as though his mind worked in a free, asso-

RICHARD WRIGHT is an American Negro whose schooling carried him through the grammar grades, and who has been educating himself ever since. His novel, *Native Son*, which was widely discussed in the year of its publication (1940), and his forthcoming autobiography, which will appear later this year, proclaim him as one of the most forthright and eloquent authors of his race.

This is the second of two installments.

"It's easy. You can learn," he said.

I was in the midst of writing a novel and he was calling me from it to tabulate the price of groceries. "He doesn't think much of what I'm trying to do," I thought.

"Comrade Nealson," I said, "a writer who hasn't written anything worth while is a most doubtful person. Now, I'm in that category. Yet I think I can write. I don't want to ask for special favors, but I'm in the midst of a book which I hope to complete in six months or so. Let me convince myself that I'm wrong about my hankering to write and then I'll be with you all the way."

"Dick," he said, turning in his chair and waving his hand as though to brush away an insect that was annoying him, "you've got to get to the masses of people."

"You've seen some of my work," I said. "Isn't it just barely good enough to warrant my being given a chance?"

"The party can't deal with your feelings," he said.

"Maybe I don't belong in the party," I stated it in full.

"Oh, no! Don't say that," he said, snorting. He looked at me. "You're blunt."

"I put things the way I feel them," I said. "I want to start in right with you. I've had too damn much crazy trouble in the party."

He laughed and lit a cigarette.

"Dick," he said, shaking his head, "the trouble with you is that you've been around with those white artists on the North Side too much. You even talk like 'em. You've got to know your own people."

"I think I know them," I said, realizing that I could never really talk with him. "I've been inside of three fourths of the Negroes' homes on the South Side."

"But you've got to work with 'em," he said.

"I was working with Ross until I was suspected of being a spy," I said.

"Dick," he spoke seriously now, "the party has decided that you are to accept this task."

I was silent. I knew the meaning of what he had said. A decision was the highest injunction that a Communist could receive from his party, and to break a decision was to break the effectiveness of the party's ability to act. In principle I heartily agreed with this, for I knew that it was impossible for working people to forge instruments of political power until they had achieved unity of action. Oppressed for centuries, divided, hopeless, corrupted, misled, they were cynical — as I had once been — and the Communist method of unity

had been found historically to be the only means of achieving discipline. In short, Nealson had asked me directly if I were a Communist or not. I wanted to be a Communist, but my kind of Communist. I wanted to shape people's feelings, awaken their hearts. But I could not tell Nealson that; he would only have snorted.

"I'll organize the committee and turn it over to someone else," I suggested.

"You don't want to do this, do you?" he asked.

"No," I said firmly.

"What would you like to do on the South Side, then?"

"I'd like to organize Negro artists," I said.

"But the party doesn't need that now," he said.

I rose, knowing that he had no intention of letting me go after I had organized the committee. I wanted to tell him that I was through, but I was not ready to bring matters to a head. I went out, angry with myself, angry with him, angry with the party. Well, I had not broken the decision, but neither had I accepted it wholly. I had dodged, trying to save time for writing, time to think.

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MY TASK consisted in attending meetings until the late hours of the night, taking part in discussions, or lending myself generally along with other Communists in leading the people of the South Side. We debated the housing situation, the best means of forcing the city to authorize open hearings on conditions among Negroes. I gritted my teeth as the daily value of pork chops was tabulated, longing to be at home with my writing.

Nealson was cleverer than I and he confronted me before I had a chance to confront him. I was summoned one night to meet Nealson and a "friend." When I arrived at a South Side hotel I was introduced to a short, yellow man who carried himself like Napoleon. He wore glasses, kept his full lips pursed as though he were engaged in perpetual thought. He swaggered when he walked. He spoke slowly, precisely, trying to charge each of his words with more meaning than the words were able to carry. He talked of trivial things in lofty tones. He said that his name was Smith, that he was from Washington, that he planned to launch a national organization among Negroes to federalize all existing Negro institutions so as to achieve a broad unity of action. The three of us sat at a table, facing one another. I knew that another and last offer was about to be made to me, and if I did not accept it, there would be open warfare.

"Wright, how would you like to go to Switzerland?" Smith asked with dramatic suddenness.

"I'd like it," I said. "But I'm tied up with work now."

"You can drop that," Nealson said. "This is important."

"What would I do in Switzerland?" I asked.

"You'll go as a youth delegate," Smith said.

"From there you can go to the Soviet Union."

"Much as I'd like to, I'm afraid I can't make it," I said honestly. "I simply cannot drop the writing I'm doing now."

We sat looking at one another, smoking silently.

"Has Nealson told you how I feel?" I asked Smith.

Smith did not answer. He stared at me a long time, then spat: "Wright, you're a fool!"

I rose. Smith turned away from me. A breath more of anger and I should have driven my fist into his face. Nealson laughed sheepishly, snorting.

"Was that necessary?" I asked, trembling.

I stood recalling how, in my boyhood, I would have fought until blood ran had anyone said anything like that to me. But I was a man now and master of my rage, able to control the surging emotions. I put on my hat and walked to the door. "Keep cool," I said to myself. "Don't let this get out of hand."

"This is good-bye," I said.

I attended the next unit meeting and asked for a place on the agenda, which was readily granted. Nealson was there. Evans was there. Ed Green was there. When my time came to speak, I said:—

"Comrades, for the past two years I've worked daily with most of you. Despite this, I have for some time found myself in a difficult position in the party. What has caused this difficulty is a long story which I do not care to recite now; it would serve no purpose. But I tell you honestly that I think I've found a solution of my difficulty. I am proposing here tonight that my membership be dropped from the party rolls. No ideological differences impel me to say this. I simply do not wish to be bound any longer by the party's decisions. I should like to retain my membership in those organizations in which the party has influence, and I shall comply with the party's program in those organizations. I hope that my words will be accepted in the spirit in which they are said. Perhaps sometime in the future I can meet and talk with the leaders of the party as to what tasks I can best perform."

I sat down amid a profound silence. The Negro secretary of the meeting looked frightened, glancing at Nealson, Evans, and Ed Green.

"Is there any discussion on Comrade Wright's statement?" the secretary asked finally.

"I move that discussion on Wright's statement be deferred," Nealson said.

A quick vote confirmed Nealson's motion. I looked about the silent room, then reached for my hat and rose.

"I should like to go now," I said.

No one said anything. I walked to the door and out into the night and a heavy burden seemed to lift from my shoulders. I was free. And I had done it in a decent and forthright manner. I had not been bitter. I had not raked up a single recrimination. I had attacked no one. I had disavowed nothing.

The next night two Negro Communists called at my home. They pretended to be ignorant of what had happened at the unit meeting. Patiently I explained what had occurred.

"Your story does not agree with what Nealson says," they said, revealing the motive of their visit.

"And what does Nealson say?" I asked.

"He says that you are in league with a Trotskyite group, and that you made an appeal for other party members to follow you in leaving the party."

"What?" I gasped. "That's not true. I asked that my membership be dropped. I raised no political issues." What did this mean? I sat pondering. "Look, maybe I ought to make my break with the party clean. If Nealson's going to act this way, I'll resign."

"You can't resign," they told me.

"What do you mean?" I demanded.

"No one can resign from the Communist Party."

I looked at them and laughed.

"You're talking crazy," I said.

"Nealson would expel you publicly, cut the ground from under your feet if you resigned," they said. "People would think that something was wrong if someone like you quit here on the South Side."

I was angry. Was the party so weak and uncertain of itself that it could not accept what I had said at the unit meeting? Who thought up such tactics? Then, suddenly, I understood. These were the secret, underground tactics of the political movement of the Communists under the tsars of Old Russia! The Communist Party felt that it had to assassinate me morally merely because I did not want to be bound by its decisions. I saw now that my comrades were acting out a fantasy that had no relation whatever to the reality of their environment.

"Tell Nealson that if he fights me, then, by God, I'll fight him," I said. "If he leaves this damn thing where it is, then all right. If he thinks I won't fight him publicly, he's crazy!"

I was not able to know if my statement reached Neelson. There was no public outcry against me, but in the ranks of the party itself a storm broke loose and I was branded a traitor, an unstable personality, and one whose faith had failed.

My comrades had known me, my family, my friends; they, God knows, had known my aching poverty. But they had never been able to conquer their fear of the individual way in which I acted and lived, an individuality which life had seared into my bones.

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I WAS transferred by the relief authorities from the South Side Boys' Club to the Federal Negro Theater to work as a publicity agent. There were days when I was acutely hungry for the incessant analyses that went on among the comrades, but whenever I heard news of the party's inner life, it was of charges and countercharges, reprisals and counterreprisals.

The Federal Negro Theater, for which I was doing publicity, had run a series of ordinary plays, all of which had been revamped to "Negro style," with jungle scenes, spirituals, and all. For example, the skinny white woman who directed it, an elderly missionary type, would take a play whose characters were white, whose theme dealt with the Middle Ages, and recast it in terms of Southern Negro life with overtones of African backgrounds. Contemporary plays dealing realistically with Negro life were spurned as being controversial. There were about forty Negro actors and actresses in the theater, lolling about, yearning, disgruntled.

What a waste of talent, I thought. Here was an opportunity for the production of a worth-while Negro drama and no one was aware of it. I studied the situation, then laid the matter before white friends of mine who held influential positions in the Works Progress Administration. I asked them to replace the white woman — including her quaint aesthetic notions — with someone who knew the Negro and the theater. They promised me that they would act.

Within a month the white woman director had been transferred. We moved from the South Side to the Loop and were housed in a first-rate theater. I successfully recommended Charles DeSheim, a talented Jew, as director. DeSheim and I held long talks during which I outlined what I thought could be accomplished. I urged that our first offering should be a bill of three one-act plays, including Paul Green's *Hymn to the Rising Sun*, a grim, poetical, powerful one-acter dealing with chain-gang conditions in the South.

I was happy. At last I was in a position to make suggestions and have them acted upon. I was convinced that we had a rare chance to build a genuine Negro theater. I convoked a meeting and introduced DeSheim to the Negro company, telling them that he was a man who knew the theater, who would lead them toward serious dramatics. DeSheim made a speech wherein he said that he was not at the theater to direct it, but to help the Negroes to direct it. He spoke so simply and eloquently that they rose and applauded him.

I then proudly passed out copies of Paul Green's *Hymn to the Rising Sun* to all members of the company. DeSheim assigned reading parts. I sat down to enjoy adult Negro dramatics. But something went wrong. The Negroes stammered and faltered in their lines. Finally they stopped reading altogether. DeSheim looked frightened. One of the Negro actors rose.

"Mr. DeSheim," he began, "we think this play is indecent. We don't want to act in a play like this before the American public. I don't think any such conditions exist in the South. I lived in the South and I never saw any chain gangs. Mr. DeSheim, we want a play that will make the public love us."

"What kind of play do you want?" DeSheim asked them.

They did not know. I went to the office and looked up their records and found that most of them had spent their lives playing cheap vaudeville. I had thought that they played vaudeville because the legitimate theater was barred to them, and now it turned out they wanted none of the legitimate theater, that they were scared spitless at the prospects of appearing in a play that the public might not like, even though they did not understand that public and had no way of determining its likes or dislikes.

I felt — but only temporarily — that perhaps the whites were right, that Negroes were children and would never grow up. DeSheim informed the company that he would produce any play they liked, and they sat like frightened mice, possessing no words to make known their vague desires.

When I arrived at the theater a few mornings later, I was horrified to find that the company had drawn up a petition demanding the ousting of DeSheim. I was asked to sign the petition and I refused.

"Don't you know your friends?" I asked them.

They glared at me. I called DeSheim to the theater and we went into a frantic conference.

"What must I do?" he asked.

"Take them into your confidence," I said. "Let them know that it is their right to petition for a redress of their grievances."

DeSheim thought my advice sound and, accordingly, he assembled the company and told them that they had a right to petition against him if they wanted to, but that he thought any misunderstandings that existed could be settled smoothly.

"Who told you that we were getting up a petition?" a black man demanded.

DeSheim looked at me and stammered wordlessly.

"There's an Uncle Tom in the theater!" a black girl yelled.

After the meeting a delegation of Negro men came to my office and took out their pocketknives and flashed them in my face.

"You get the hell off this job before we cut your bellybutton out!" they said.

I telephoned my white friends in the Works Progress Administration: "Transfer me at once to another job, or I'll be murdered."

Within twenty-four hours DeSheim and I were given our papers. We shook hands and went our separate ways.

I was transferred to a white experimental theatrical company as a publicity agent and I resolved to keep my ideas to myself, or, better, to write them down and not attempt to translate them into reality.

12

ONE evening a group of Negro Communists called at my home and asked to speak to me in strict secrecy. I took them into my room and locked the door.

"Dick," they began abruptly, "the party wants you to attend a meeting Sunday."

"Why?" I asked. "I'm no longer a member."

"That's all right. They want you to be present," they said.

"Communists don't speak to me on the street," I said. "Now, why do you want me at a meeting?"

They hedged. They did not want to tell me.

"If you can't tell me, then I can't come," I said.

They whispered among themselves and finally decided to take me into their confidence.

"Dick, Ross is going to be tried," they said.

"For what?"

They recited a long list of political offenses of which they alleged that he was guilty.

"But what has that got to do with me?"

"If you come, you'll find out," they said.

"I'm not that naïve," I said. I was suspicious now. Were they trying to lure me to a trial and expel me? "This trial might turn out to be mine."

They swore that they had no intention of placing me on trial, that the party merely wanted me to

observe Ross's trial so that I might learn what happened to "enemies of the working class."

As they talked, my old love of witnessing something new came over me. I wanted to see this trial, but I did not want to risk being placed on trial myself.

"Listen," I told them. "I'm not guilty of Nealson's charges. If I showed up at this trial, it would seem that I am."

"No, it won't. Please come."

"All right. But, listen. If I'm tricked, I'll fight. You hear? I don't trust Nealson. I'm not a politician and I cannot anticipate all the funny moves of a man who spends his waking hours plotting."

Ross's trial took place that following Sunday afternoon. Comrades stood inconspicuously on guard about the meeting hall, at the doors, down the street, and along the hallways. When I appeared, I was ushered in quickly. I was tense. It was a rule that once you had entered a meeting of this kind you could not leave until the meeting was over; it was feared that you might go to the police and denounce them all.

Ross, the accused, sat alone at a table in the front of the hall, his face distraught. I felt sorry for him; yet I could not escape feeling that he enjoyed this. For him, this was perhaps the highlight of an otherwise bleak existence.

In trying to grasp why Communists hated intellectuals, my mind was led back again to the accounts I had read of the Russian Revolution. There had existed in Old Russia millions of poor, ignorant people who were exploited by a few educated, arrogant noblemen, and it became natural for the Russian Communists to associate betrayal with intellectualism. But there existed in the Western world an element that baffled and frightened the Communist Party: the prevalence of self-achieved literacy. Even a Negro, entrapped by ignorance and exploitation, — as I had been, — could, if he had the will and the love for it, learn to read and to understand the world in which he lived. And it was these people that the Communists could not understand.

The trial began in a quiet, informal manner. The comrades acted like a group of neighbors sitting in judgment upon one of their kind who had stolen a chicken. Anybody could ask and get the floor. There was absolute freedom of speech. Yet the meeting had an amazingly formal structure of its own, a structure that went as deep as the desire of men to live together.

A member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party rose and gave a description of the world situation. He spoke without emotion and

I could not stay until the end. I was anxious to get out of the hall and into the streets and shake free from the gigantic tension that had hold of me. I rose and went to the door; a comrade shook his head, warning me that I could not leave until the trial had ended.

"You can't leave now," he said.

"I'm going out of here," I said, my anger making my voice louder than I intended.

We glared at each other. Another comrade came running up. I stepped forward. The comrade who had rushed up gave the signal for me to be allowed to leave. They did not want violence, and neither did I. They stepped aside.

I went into the dark Chicago streets and walked home through the cold, filled with a sense of sadness. Once again I told myself that I must learn to stand alone. I did not feel so wounded by their rejection of me that I wanted to spend my days bleating about what they had done. Perhaps what I had already learned to feel in my childhood saved me from that futile path. I lay in bed that night and said to myself: "I'll be for them, even though they are not for me."

13

FROM the Federal Experimental Theater I was transferred to the Federal Writers' Project, and I tried to earn my bread by writing guidebooks. Many of the writers on the project were members of the Communist Party and they kept their revolutionary vows that restrained them from speaking to "traitors of the working class." I sat beside them in the office, ate next to them in restaurants, and rode up and down in the elevators with them, but they always looked straight ahead, wordlessly.

After working on the project for a few months, I was made acting supervisor of essays and straightway I ran into political difficulties. One morning the administrator of the project called me into his office.

"Wright, who are your friends on this project?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said. "Why?"

"Well, you ought to find out soon," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Some people are asking for your removal on the ground that you are incompetent," he said.

"Who are they?"

He named several of my erstwhile comrades. Yes, it had come to that. They were trying to take the bread out of my mouth.

"What do you propose to do about their complaints?" I asked.

"Nothing," he said, laughing. "I think I understand what's happening here. I'm not going to let them drive you off this job."

I thanked him and rose to go to the door. Something in his words had not sounded right. I turned and faced him.

"This job?" I repeated. "What do you mean?"

"You mean to say that you don't know?" he asked.

"Know what? What are you talking about?"

"Why did you leave the Federal Negro Theater?"

"I had trouble there. They drove me off the job, the Negroes did."

"And you don't think that they had any encouragement?" he asked me ironically.

I sat again. This was deadly. I gaped at him.

"You needn't fear here," he said. "You work, write."

"It's hard to believe that," I murmured.

"Forget it," he said.

But the worst was yet to come. One day at noon I closed my desk and went down in the elevator. When I reached the first floor of the building, I saw a picket line moving to and fro in the streets. Many of the men and women carrying placards were old friends of mine, and they were chanting for higher wages for Works Progress Administration artists and writers. It was not the kind of picket line that one was not supposed to cross, and as I started away from the door I heard my name shouted: —

"There's Wright, that goddamn Trotskyite!"

"We know you, you —!"

"Wright's a traitor!"

For a moment it seemed that I ceased to live. I had now reached that point where I was cursed aloud in the busy streets of America's second-largest city. It shook me as nothing else had.

Days passed. I continued on my job, where I functioned as the shop chairman of the union which I had helped to organize, though my election as shop chairman had been bitterly opposed by the party. In their efforts to nullify my influence in the union, my old comrades were willing to kill the union itself.

As May Day of 1936 approached, it was voted by the union membership that we should march in the public procession. On the morning of May Day I received printed instructions as to the time and place where our union contingent would assemble to join the parade. At noon I hurried to the spot and found that the parade was already in progress. In vain I searched for the banners of my union local. Where were they? I went up and down the streets, asking for the location of my local.

"Oh, that local's gone fifteen minutes ago," a



Negro told me. "If you're going to march, you'd better fall in somewhere."

I thanked him and walked through the milling crowds. Suddenly I heard my name called. I turned. To my left was the Communist Party's South Side section, lined up and ready to march.

"Come here!" an old party friend called to me.

I walked over to him.

"Aren't you marching today?" he asked me.

"I missed my union local," I told him.

"What the hell," he said. "March with us."

"I don't know," I said, remembering my last visit to the headquarters of the party, and my status as an "enemy."

"This is May Day," he said. "Get into the ranks."

"You know the trouble I've had," I said.

"That's nothing," he said. "Everybody's marching today."

"I don't think I'd better," I said, shaking my head.

"Are you scared?" he asked. "This is *May Day*."

He caught my right arm and pulled me into line beside him. I stood talking to him, asking him about his work, about common friends.

"Get out of our ranks!" a voice barked.

I turned. A white Communist, a leader of the district of the Communist Party, Cy Perry, a slender, close-cropped fellow, stood glaring at me.

"I — It's May Day and I want to march," I said.

"Get out!" he shouted.

"I was invited here," I said.

I turned to the Negro Communist who had invited me into the ranks. I did not want public violence. I looked at my friend. He turned his eyes away. He was afraid. I did not know what to do.

"You asked me to march here," I said to him.

He did not answer.

"Tell him that you did invite me," I said, pulling his sleeve.

"I'm asking you for the last time to get out of our ranks!" Cy Perry shouted.

I did not move. I had intended to, but I was beset by so many impulses that I could not act. Another white Communist came to assist Perry. Perry caught hold of my collar and pulled at me. I resisted. They held me fast. I struggled to free myself.

"Turn me loose!" I said.

Hands lifted me bodily from the sidewalk; I felt myself being pitched headlong through the air. I saved myself from landing on my head by clutching a curbstone with my hands. Slowly I rose and stood. Perry and his assistant were glaring at me. The rows of white and black Communists were look-

ing at me with cold eyes of non-recognition. I could not quite believe what had happened, even though my hands were smarting and bleeding. I had suffered a public, physical assault by two white Communists with black Communists looking on. I could not move from the spot. I was empty of any idea about what to do. But I did not feel belligerent. I had outgrown my childhood.

Suddenly, the vast ranks of the Communist Party began to move. Scarlet banners with the hammer and sickle emblem of world revolution were lifted, and they fluttered in the May breeze. Drums beat. Voices were chanting. The tramp of many feet shook the earth. A long line of set-faced men and women, white and black, flowed past me.

I followed the procession to the Loop and went into Grant Park Plaza and sat upon a bench. I was not thinking; I could not think. But an objectivity of vision was being born within me. A surging sweep of many odds and ends came together and formed an attitude, a perspective. "They're blind," I said to myself. "Their enemies have blinded them with too much oppression." I lit a cigarette and I heard a song floating out over the sunlit air: —

"Arise you pris'ners of starvation!"

I remembered the stories I had written, the stories in which I had assigned a role of honor and glory to the Communist Party, and I was glad that they were down in black and white, were finished. For I knew in my heart that I should never be able to write that way again, should never be able to feel with that simple sharpness about life, should never again express such passionate hope, should never again make so total a commitment of faith.

"A better world's in birth . . ."

The procession still passed. Banners still floated. Voices of hope still chanted.

I headed toward home alone, really alone now, telling myself that in all the sprawling immensity of our mighty continent the least-known factor of living was the human heart, the least-sought goal of being was a way to live a human life. Perhaps, I thought, out of my tortured feelings I could fling a spark into this darkness. I would try, not because I wanted to but because I felt that I had to if I were to live at all.

I would hurl words into this darkness and wait for an echo; and if an echo sounded, no matter how faintly, I would send other words to tell, to march, to fight, to create a sense of the hunger for life that gnaws in us all, to keep alive in our hearts a sense of the inexpressibly human.



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I TRIED TO BE A COMMUNIST

by RICHARD WRIGHT

1

ONE Thursday night I received an invitation from a group of white boys I had known when I was working in the post office to meet in one of Chicago's South Side hotels and argue the state of the world. About ten of us gathered, and ate salami sandwiches, drank beer, and talked. I was amazed to discover that many of them had joined the Communist Party. I challenged them by reciting the antics of the Negro Communists I had seen in the parks, and I was told that those antics were "tactics" and were all right. I was dubious.

Then one Thursday night Sol, a Jewish chap, startled us by announcing that he had had a short story accepted by a little magazine called the *Anvil*, edited by Jack Conroy, and that he had joined a revolutionary artist organization, the John Reed Club. Sol repeatedly begged me to attend the meetings of the club.

"You'd like them," Sol said.

"I don't want to be organized," I said.

"They can help you to write," he said.

"Nobody can tell me how or what to write," I said.

"Come and see," he urged. "What have you to lose?"

I felt that Communists could not possibly have a sincere interest in Negroes. I was cynical and I would rather have heard a white man say that he hated Negroes, which I could have readily believed, than to have heard him say that he respected Negroes, which would have made me doubt him.

One Saturday night, bored with reading, I decided to appear at the John Reed Club in the capacity of an amused spectator. I rode to the Loop and found the number. A dark stairway led upwards; it

did not look welcoming. What on earth of importance could happen in so dingy a place? Through the windows above me I saw vague murals along the walls. I mounted the stairs to a door that was lettered: THE CHICAGO JOHN REED CLUB.

I opened it and stepped into the strangest room I had ever seen. Paper and cigarette butts lay on the floor. A few benches ran along the walls, above which were vivid colors depicting colossal figures of workers carrying streaming banners. The mouths of the workers gaped in wild cries; their legs were sprawled over cities.

"Hello."

I turned and saw a white man smiling at me.

"A friend of mine, who's a member of this club, asked me to visit here. His name is Sol —," I told him.

"You're welcome here," the white man said. "We're not having an affair tonight. We're holding an editorial meeting. Do you paint?" He was slightly gray and he had a mustache.

"No," I said. "I try to write."

"Then sit in on the editorial meeting of our magazine, *Left Front*," he suggested.

"I know nothing of editing," I said.

"You can learn," he said.

I stared at him, doubting.

"I don't want to be in the way here," I said.

"My name's Grimm," he said.

I told him my name and we shook hands. He went to a closet and returned with an armful of magazines.

"Here are some back issues of the *Masses*," he said. "Have you ever read it?"

"No," I said.

"Some of the best writers in America publish in it," he explained. He also gave me copies of a magazine called *International Literature*. "There's stuff here from Gide, Gorky —"

I assured him that I would read them. He took me to an office and introduced me to a Jewish boy

RICHARD WRIGHT is an American Negro whose schooling carried him through the grammar grade and who has been educating himself ever since. His novel, *Native Son*, which was widely discussed in the year of its publication (1940), and his forthcoming autobiography, which will appear later this year, proclaim him as one of the most forthright and eloquent authors of his race. This is the first of two installments.

eral program for the club. Feelings waxed violent and bitter. Then the showdown came. I was informed that if I wanted to continue as secretary of the club I should have to join the Communist Party. I stated that I favored a policy that allowed for the development of writers and artists. My policy was accepted. I signed the membership card.

One night a Jewish chap appeared at one of our meetings and introduced himself as Comrade Young of Detroit. He told us that he was a member of the Communist Party, a member of the Detroit John Reed Club, that he planned to make his home in Chicago. He was a short, friendly, black-haired, well-read fellow with hanging lips and bulging eyes. Shy of forces to execute the demands of the Communist Party, we welcomed him. But I could not make out Young's personality; whenever I asked him a simple question, he looked off and stammered a confused answer. I decided to send his references to the Communist Party for checking and forthwith named him for membership in the club. He's O.K., I thought. Just a queer artist.

After the meeting Comrade Young confronted me with a problem. He had no money, he said, and asked if he could sleep temporarily on the club's premises. Believing him loyal, I gave him permission. Straightway Young became one of the most ardent members of our organization, admired by all. His paintings — which I did not understand — impressed our best artists. No report about Young had come from the Communist Party, but since Young seemed a conscientious worker, I did not think the omission serious in any case.

At a meeting one night Young asked that his name be placed upon the agenda; when his time came to speak, he rose and launched into one of the most violent and bitter political attacks in the club's history upon Swann, one of our best young artists. We were aghast. Young accused Swann of being a traitor to the workers, an opportunist, a collaborator with the police, and an adherent of Trotsky. Naturally most of the club's members assumed that Young, a member of the party, was voicing the ideas of the party. Surprised and baffled, I moved that Young's statement be referred to the executive committee for decision. Swann rightfully protested; he declared that he had been attacked in public and would answer in public.

It was voted that Swann should have the floor. He refuted Young's wild charges, but the majority of the club's members were bewildered, did not know whether to believe him or not. We all liked Swann, did not believe him guilty of any misconduct; but we did not want to offend the party. A verbal battle

ensued. Finally the members who had been silent in deference to the party rose and demanded of me that the foolish charges against Swann be withdrawn. Again I moved that the matter be referred to the executive committee, and again my proposal was voted down. The membership had now begun to distrust the party's motives. They were afraid to let an executive committee, the majority of whom were party members, pass upon the charges made by party member Young.

A delegation of members asked me later if I had anything to do with Young's charges. I was so hurt and humiliated that I disavowed all relations with Young. Determined to end the farce, I cornered Young and demanded to know who had given him authority to castigate Swann.

"I've been asked to rid the club of traitors."

"But Swann isn't a traitor," I said.

"We must have a purge," he said, his eyes bulging, his face quivering with passion.

I admitted his great revolutionary fervor, but I felt that his zeal was a trifle excessive. The situation became worse. A delegation of members informed me that if the charges against Swann were not withdrawn, they would resign in a body. I was frantic. I wrote to the Communist Party to ask why orders had been issued to punish Swann, and a reply came back that no such orders had been issued. Then what was Young up to? Who was prompting him? I finally begged the club to let me place the matter before the leaders of the Communist Party. After a violent debate, my proposal was accepted.

One night ten of us met in an office of a leader of the party to hear Young restate his charges against Swann. The party leader, aloof and amused, gave Young the signal to begin. Young unrolled a sheaf of papers and declaimed a list of political charges that excelled in viciousness his previous charges. I stared at Young, feeling that he was making a dreadful mistake, but fearing him because he had, by his own account, the sanction of high political authority.

When Young finished, the party leader asked, "Will you allow me to read these charges?"

"Of course," said Young, surrendering a copy of his indictment. "You may keep that copy. I have ten carbons."

"Why did you make so many carbons?" the leader asked.

"I didn't want anyone to steal them," Young said.

"If this man's charges against me are taken seriously," Swann said, "I'll resign and publicly denounce the club."

"You see!" Young yelled. "He's with the police!"

I was sick. The meeting ended with a promise from the party leader to read the charges carefully and render a verdict as to whether Swann should be placed on trial or not. I was convinced that something was wrong, but I could not figure it out. One afternoon I went to the club to have a long talk with Young; but when I arrived, he was not there. Nor was he there the next day. For a week I sought Young in vain. Meanwhile the club's members asked his whereabouts and they would not believe me when I told them that I did not know. Was he ill? Had he been picked up by the police?

One afternoon Comrade Grimm and I sneaked into the club's headquarters and opened Young's luggage. What we saw amazed and puzzled us. First of all, there was a scroll of paper twenty yards long — one page pasted to another — which had drawings depicting the history of the human race from a Marxist point of view. The first page read: *A Pictorial Record of Man's Economic Progress.*

"This is terribly ambitious," I said.

"He's very studious," Grimm said.

There were long dissertations written in long-hand; some were political and others dealt with the history of art. Finally we found a letter with a Detroit return address and I promptly wrote asking news of our esteemed member. A few days later a letter came which said in part: —

DEAR SIR:

In reply to your letter, we beg to inform you that Mr. Young, who was a patient in our institution and who escaped from our custody a few months ago, has been apprehended and returned to this institution for mental treatment.

I was thunderstruck. Was this true? Undoubtedly it was. Then what kind of club did we run that a lunatic could step into it and help run it? Were we all so mad that we could not detect a madman when we saw one?

I made a motion that all charges against Swann be dropped, which was done. I offered Swann an apology, but as the leader of the Chicago John Reed Club I was a sobered and chastened Communist.

4

THE Communist Party fraction in the John Reed Club instructed me to ask my party cell — or "unit," as it was called — to assign me to full duty in the work of the club. I was instructed to give my unit a report of my activities, writing, organizing, speaking. I agreed and wrote the report.

A unit, membership in which is obligatory for all Communists, is the party's basic form of organiza-

tion. Unit meetings are held on certain nights which are kept secret for fear of police raids. Nothing treasonable occurs at these meetings; but once one is a Communist, one does not have to be guilty of wrongdoing to attract the attention of the police.

I went to my first unit meeting — which was held in the Black Belt of the South Side — and introduced myself to the Negro organizer.

"Welcome, comrade," he said, grinning. "We're glad to have a writer with us."

"I'm not much of a writer," I said.

The meeting started. About twenty Negroes were gathered. The time came for me to make my report and I took out my notes and told them how I had come to join the party, what few stray items I had published, what my duties were in the John Reed Club. I finished and waited for comment. There was silence. I looked about. Most of the comrades sat with bowed heads. Then I was surprised to catch a twitching smile on the lips of a Negro woman. Minutes passed. The Negro woman lifted her head and looked at the organizer. The organizer smothered a smile. Then the woman broke into unrestrained laughter, bending forward and burying her face in her hands. I stared. Had I said something funny?

"What's the matter?" I asked.

The giggling became general. The unit organizer, who had been dallying with his pencil, looked up.

"It's all right, comrade," he said. "We're glad to have a writer in the party."

There was more smothered laughter. What kind of people were these? I had made a serious report and now I heard giggles.

"I did the best I could," I said uneasily. "I realize that writing is not basic or important. But, given time, I think I can make a contribution."

"We know you can, comrade," the black organizer said.

His tone was more patronizing than that of a Southern white man. I grew angry. I thought I knew these people, but evidently I did not. I wanted to take issue with their attitude, but caution urged me to talk it over with others first.

During the following days I learned through discreet questioning that I had seemed a fantastic element to the black Communists. I was shocked to hear that I, who had been only to grammar school, had been classified as an *intellectual*. What was an intellectual? I had never heard the word used in the sense in which it was applied to me. I had thought that they might refuse me on the ground that I was not politically advanced; I had thought they might say I would have to be investigated. But they had simply laughed.

I learned, to my dismay, that the black Communists in my unit had commented upon my shined shoes, my clean shirt, and the tie I had worn. Above all, my manner of speech had seemed an alien thing to them.

"He talks like a book," one of the Negro comrades had said. And that was enough to condemn me forever as bourgeois.

5

IN MY party work I met a Negro Communist, Ross, who was under indictment for "inciting to riot." Ross typified the effective street agitator. Southern-born, he had migrated north and his life reflected the crude hopes and frustrations of the peasant in the city. Distrustful but aggressive, he was a bundle of the weaknesses and virtues of a man struggling blindly between two societies, of a man living on the margin of a culture. I felt that if I could get his story I could make known some of the difficulties inherent in the adjustment of a folk people to an urban environment; I should make his life more intelligible to others than it was to himself.

I approached Ross and explained my plan. He was agreeable. He invited me to his home, introduced me to his Jewish wife, his young son, his friends. I talked to Ross for hours, explaining what I was about, cautioning him not to relate anything that he did not want to divulge.

"I'm after the things that made you a Communist," I said.

Word spread in the Communist Party that I was taking notes on the life of Ross, and strange things began to happen. A quiet black Communist came to my home one night and called me out to the street to speak to me in private. He made a prediction about my future that frightened me.

"Intellectuals don't fit well into the party, Wright," he said solemnly.

"But I'm not an intellectual," I protested. "I sweep the streets for a living." I had just been assigned by the relief system to sweep the streets for thirteen dollars a week.

"That doesn't make any difference," he said. "We've kept records of the trouble we've had with intellectuals in the past. It's estimated that only 13 per cent of them remain in the party."

"Why do they leave, since you insist upon calling me an intellectual?" I asked.

"Most of them drop out of their own accord."

"Well, I'm not dropping out," I said.

"Some are expelled," he hinted gravely.

"For what?"

"General opposition to the party's policies," he said.

"But I'm not opposing anything in the party."

"You'll have to prove your revolutionary loyalty."

"How?"

"The party has a way of testing people."

"Well, talk. What is this?"

"How do you react to police?"

"I don't react to them," I said. "I've never been bothered by them."

"Do you know Evans?" he asked, referring to a local militant Negro Communist.

"Yes. I've seen him; I've met him."

"Did you notice that he was injured?"

"Yes. His head was bandaged."

"He got that wound from the police in a demonstration," he explained. "That's proof of revolutionary loyalty."

"Do you mean that I must get whacked over the head by cops to prove that I'm sincere?" I asked.

"I'm not suggesting anything," he said. "I'm explaining."

"Look. Suppose a cop whacks me over the head and I suffer a brain concussion. Suppose I'm nuts after that. Can I write then? What shall I have proved?"

He shook his head. "The Soviet Union has had to shoot a lot of intellectuals," he said.

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "Do you know what you're saying? You're not in Russia. You're standing on a sidewalk in Chicago. You talk like a man lost in a fantasy."

"You've heard of Trotsky, haven't you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Do you know what happened to him?"

"He was banished from the Soviet Union," I said.

"Do you know why?"

"Well," I stammered, trying not to reveal my ignorance of politics, for I had not followed the details of Trotsky's fight against the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, "it seems that after a decision had been made, he broke that decision by organizing against the party."

"It was for counter-revolutionary activity," he snapped impatiently; I learned afterwards that my answer had not been satisfactory, had not been couched in the acceptable phrases of bitter, anti-Trotsky denunciation.

"I understand," I said. "But I've never read Trotsky. What's his stand on minorities?"

"Why ask me?" he asked. "I don't read Trotsky."

"Look," I said. "If you found me reading Trotsky, what would that mean to you?"

"Comrade, you don't understand," he said in an annoyed tone.

That ended the conversation. But that was not the last time I was to hear the phrase: "Comrade, you don't understand." I had not been aware of holding wrong ideas. I had not read any of Trotsky's works; indeed, the very opposite had been true. It had been Stalin's *National and Colonial Question* that had captured my interest.

Of all the developments in the Soviet Union, the way scores of backward peoples had been led to unity on a national scale was what had enthralled me. I had read with awe how the Communists had sent phonetic experts into the vast regions of Russia to listen to the stammering dialects of peoples oppressed for centuries by the tsars. I had made the first total emotional commitment of my life when I read how the phonetic experts had given these tongueless people a language, newspapers, institutions. I had read how these forgotten folk had been encouraged to keep their old cultures, to see in their ancient customs meanings and satisfactions as deep as those contained in supposedly superior ways of living. And I had exclaimed to myself how different this was from the way in which Negroes were sneered at in America.

Then what was the meaning of the warning I had received from the black Communist? Why was I a suspected man because I wanted to reveal the vast physical and spiritual ravages of Negro life, the profundity latent in these rejected people, the dramas as old as man and the sun and the mountains and the seas that were taking place in the poverty of black America? What was the danger in showing the kinship between the sufferings of the Negro and the sufferings of other people?

6

I SAT one morning in Ross's home with his wife and child. I was scribbling furiously upon my yellow sheets of paper. The doorbell rang and Ross's wife admitted a black Communist, one Ed Green. He was tall, taciturn, soldierly, square-shouldered. I was introduced to him and he nodded stiffly.

"What's happening here?" he asked bluntly.

Ross explained my project to him, and as Ross talked I could see Ed Green's face darken. He had not sat down and when Ross's wife offered him a chair he did not hear her.

"What're you going to do with these notes?" he asked me.

"I hope to weave them into stories," I said.

"What're you asking the party members?"

"About their lives in general."

"Who suggested this to you?" he asked.

"Nobody. I thought of it myself."

"Were you ever a member of any other political group?"

"I worked with the Republicans once," I said.

"I mean, revolutionary organizations?" he asked.

"No. Why do you ask?"

"What kind of work do you do?"

"I sweep the streets for a living."

"How far did you go in school?"

"Through the grammar grades."

"You talk like a man who went further than that," he said.

"I've read books. I taught myself."

"I don't know," he said, looking off.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "What's wrong?"

"To whom have you shown this material?"

"I've shown it to no one yet."

What was the meaning of his questions? Naïvely I thought that he himself would make a good model for a biographical sketch.

"I'd like to interview you next," I said.

"I'm not interested," he snapped.

His manner was so rough that I did not urge him. He called Ross into a rear room. I sat feeling that I was guilty of something. In a few minutes Ed Green returned, stared at me wordlessly, then marched out.

"Who does he think he is?" I asked Ross.

"He's a member of the Central Committee," Ross said.

"But why does he act like that?"

"Oh, he's always like that," Ross said uneasily.

There was a long silence.

"He's wondering what you're doing with this material," Ross said finally.

I looked at him. He, too, had been captured by suspicion. He was trying to hide the fear in his face.

"You don't have to tell me anything you don't want to," I said.

That seemed to soothe him for a moment. But the seed of doubt had already been planted. I felt dizzy. Was I mad? Or were these people mad?

"You see, Dick," Ross's wife said, "Ross is under an indictment. Ed Green is the representative of the International Labor Defense for the South Side. It's his duty to keep track of the people he's trying to defend. He wanted to know if Ross has given you anything that could be used against him in court."

I was speechless.

"What does he think I am?" I demanded.

There was no answer.

"You lost people!" I cried, and banged my fist on the table.

Ross was shaken and ashamed. "Aw, Ed Green's just supercautious," he mumbled.

"Ross," I asked, "do you trust me?"

"Oh, yes," he said uneasily.

We two black men sat in the same room looking at each other in fear. Both of us were hungry. Both of us depended upon public charity to eat and for a place to sleep. Yet we had more doubt in our hearts of each other than of the men who had cast the mold of our lives.

I continued to take notes on Ross's life, but each successive morning found him more reticent. I pitied him and did not argue with him, for I knew that persuasion would not nullify his fears. Instead I sat and listened to him and his friends tell tales of Southern Negro experience, noting them down in my mind, not daring to ask questions for fear they would become alarmed.

In spite of their fears, I became drenched in the details of their lives. I gave up the idea of the biographical sketches and settled finally upon writing a series of short stories, using the material I had got from Ross and his friends, building upon it, inventing. I wove a tale of a group of black boys trespassing upon the property of a white man and the lynching that followed. The story was published in an anthology under the title of "Big Boy Leaves Home," but its appearance came too late to influence the Communists who were questioning the use to which I was putting their lives.

My fitful work assignments from the relief officials ceased and I looked for work that did not exist. I borrowed money to ride to and fro on the club's business. I found a cramped attic for my mother and aunt and brother behind some railroad tracks. At last the relief authorities placed me in the South Side Boys' Club and my wages were just enough to provide a bare living for my family.

Then political problems rose to plague me. Ross, whose life I had tried to write, was charged by the Communist Party with "anti-leadership tendencies," "class collaborationist attitudes," and "ideological factionalism" — phrases so fanciful that I gaped when I heard them. And it was rumored that I, too, would face similar charges. It was believed that I had been politically influenced by him.

One night a group of black comrades came to my house and ordered me to stay away from Ross.

"But why?" I demanded.

"He's an unhealthy element," they said. "Can't you accept a decision?"

"Is this a decision of the Communist Party?"

"Yes," they said.

"If I were guilty of something, I'd feel bound to keep your decision," I said. "But I've done nothing."

"Comrade, you don't understand," they said.

"Members of the party do not violate the party's decisions."

"But your decision does not apply to me," I said.

"I'll be damned if I'll act as if it does."

"Your attitude does not merit our trust," they said.

I was angry.

"Look," I exploded, rising and sweeping my arms at the bleak attic in which I lived. "What is it here that frightens you? You know where I work. You know what I earn. You know my friends. Now, what in God's name is wrong?"

They left with mirthless smiles which implied that I would soon know what was wrong.

But there was relief from these shadowy political bouts. I found my work in the South Side Boys' Club deeply engrossing. Each day black boys between the ages of eight and twenty-five came to swim, draw, and read. They were a wild and homeless lot, culturally lost, spiritually disinherited, candidates for the clinics, morgues, prisons, reformatories, and the electric chair of the state's death house. For hours I listened to their talk of planes, women, guns, politics, and crime. Their figures of speech were as forceful and colorful as any ever used by English-speaking people. I kept pencil and paper in my pocket to jot down their word-rhythms and reactions. These boys did not fear people to the extent that every man looked like a spy. The Communists who doubted my motives did not know these boys, their twisted dreams, their all too clear destinies; and I doubted if I should ever be able to convey to them the tragedy I saw here.

7

PARTY duties broke into my efforts at expression. The club decided upon a conference of all the left-wing writers in the Middle West. I supported the idea and argued that the conference should deal with craft problems. My arguments were rejected. The conference, the club decided, would deal with political questions. I asked for a definition of what was expected from the writers — books or political activity. Both, was the answer. Write a few hours a day and march on the picket line the other hours.

The conference convened with a leading Communist attending as adviser. The question debated

was: What does the Communist Party expect from the club? The answer of the Communist leader ran from organizing to writing novels. I argued that either a man organized or he wrote novels. The party leader said that both must be done. The attitude of the party leader prevailed and *Left Front*, for which I had worked so long, was voted out of existence.

I knew now that the club was nearing its end, and I rose and stated my gloomy conclusions, recommending that the club dissolve. My "defeatism," as it was called, brought upon my head the sharpest disapproval of the party leader. The conference ended with the passing of a multitude of resolutions dealing with China, India, Germany, Japan, and conditions afflicting various parts of the earth. But not one idea regarding writing had emerged.

The ideas I had expounded at the conference were linked with the suspicions I had roused among the Negro Communists on the South Side, and the Communist Party was now certain that it had a dangerous enemy in its midst. It was whispered that I was trying to lead a secret group in opposition to the party. I had learned that denial of accusations was useless. It was now painful to meet a Communist, for I did not know what his attitude would be.

Following the conference, a national John Reed Club congress was called. It convened in the summer of 1934 with left-wing writers attending from all states. But as the sessions got under way there was a sense of looseness, bewilderment, and dissatisfaction among the writers, most of whom were young, eager, and on the verge of doing their best work. No one knew what was expected of him, and out of the congress came no unifying idea.

As the congress drew to a close, I attended a caucus to plan the future of the clubs. Ten of us met in a Loop hotel room, and to my amazement the leaders of the clubs' national board confirmed my criticisms of the manner in which the clubs had been conducted. I was excited. Now, I thought, the clubs will be given a new lease on life.

Then I was stunned when I heard a nationally known Communist announce a decision to dissolve the clubs. Why? I asked. Because the clubs do not serve the new People's Front policy, I was told. That can be remedied; the clubs can be made healthy and broad, I said. No; a bigger and better organization must be launched, one in which the leading writers of the nation could be included, they said. I was informed that the People's Front policy was now the correct vision of life and that the clubs could no longer exist. I asked what was to become of the young writers whom the Communist Party

had implored to join the clubs and who were ineligible for the new group, and there was no answer. "This thing is cold!" I exclaimed to myself. To effect a swift change in policy, the Communist Party was dumping one organization, then organizing a new scheme with entirely new people!

I found myself arguing alone against the majority opinion and then I made still another amazing discovery. I saw that even those who agreed with me would not support me. At that meeting I learned that when a man was informed of the wish of the party he submitted, even though he knew with all the strength of his brain that the wish was not a wise one, was one that would ultimately harm the party's interests.

It was not courage that made me oppose the party. I simply did not know any better. It was inconceivable to me, though bred in the lap of Southern hate, that a man could not have his say. I had spent a third of my life traveling from the place of my birth to the North just to talk freely, to escape the pressure of fear. And now I was facing fear again.

Before the congress adjourned, it was decided that another congress of American writers would be called in New York the following summer, 1935. I was lukewarm to the proposal and tried to make up my mind to stand alone, write alone. I was already afraid that the stories I had written would not fit into the new, official mood. Must I discard my plot-ideas and seek new ones? No. I could not. My writing was my way of seeing, my way of living, my way of feeling; and who could change his sight, his sense of direction, his senses?

8

THE spring of 1935 came and the plans for the writers' congress went on apace. For some obscure reason — it might have been to "save" me — I was urged by the local Communists to attend and I was named as a delegate. I got time off from my job at the South Side Boys' Club and, along with several other delegates, hitchhiked to New York.

We arrived in the early evening and registered for the congress sessions. The opening mass meeting was being held at Carnegie Hall. I asked about housing accommodations, and the New York John Reed Club members, all white members of the Communist Party, looked embarrassed. I waited while one white Communist called another white Communist to one side and discussed what could be done to get me, a black Chicago Communist, housed. During the trip I had not thought of my-

self as a Negro; I had been mulling over the problems of the young left-wing writers I knew. Now, as I stood watching one white comrade talk frantically to another about the color of my skin, I felt disgusted. The white comrade returned.

"Just a moment, comrade," he said to me. "I'll get a place for you."

"But haven't you places already?" I asked. "Matters of this sort are ironed out in advance."

"Yes," he admitted in an intimate tone. "We have some addresses here, but we don't know the people. You understand?"

"Yes, I understand," I said, gritting my teeth.

"But just wait a second," he said, touching my arm to reassure me. "I'll find something."

"Listen, don't bother," I said, trying to keep anger out of my voice.

"Oh, no," he said, shaking his head determinedly. "This is a problem and I'll solve it."

"It oughtn't to be a problem," I could not help saying.

"Oh, I didn't mean that," he caught himself.

I cursed under my breath. Several people standing near-by observed the white Communist trying to find a black Communist a place to sleep. I burned with shame. A few minutes later the white Communist returned, frantic-eyed, sweating.

"Did you find anything?" I asked.

"No, not yet," he said, panting. "Just a moment. I'm going to call somebody I know. Say, give me a nickel for the phone."

"Forget it," I said. My legs felt like water. "I'll find a place. But I'd like to get my suitcase somewhere until after the meeting tonight."

"Do you really think you can find a place?" he asked, trying to keep a note of desperate hope out of his voice.

"Of course I can," I said.

He was still uncertain. He wanted to help me, but he did not know how. He locked my bag in a closet and I stepped to the sidewalk wondering where I would sleep that night. I stood on the sidewalks of New York with a black skin and practically no money, absorbed, not with the burning questions of the left-wing literary movement in the United States, but with the problem of how to get a bath. I presented my credentials at Carnegie Hall. The building was jammed with people. As I listened to the militant speeches, I found myself wondering why in hell I had come.

I went to the sidewalk and stood studying the faces of the people. I met a Chicago club member.

"Didn't you find a place yet?" he asked.

"No," I said. "I'd like to try one of the hotels,

but, God, I'm in no mood to argue with a hotel clerk about my color."

"Oh, hell, wait a minute," he said.

He scooted off. He returned in a few moments with a big, heavy white woman. He introduced us.

"You can sleep in my place tonight," she said.

I walked with her to her apartment and she introduced me to her husband. I thanked them for their hospitality and went to sleep on a cot in the kitchen. I got up at six, dressed, tapped on their door, and bade them good-bye. I went to the sidewalk, sat on a bench, took out pencil and paper, and tried to jot down notes for the argument I wanted to make in defense of the John Reed Clubs. But the problem of the clubs did not seem important. What did seem important was: Could a Negro ever live halfway like a human being in this goddamn country?

That day I sat through the congress sessions, but what I heard did not touch me. That night I found my way to Harlem and walked pavements filled with black life. I was amazed, when I asked passers-by, to learn that there were practically no hotels for Negroes in Harlem. I kept walking. Finally I saw a tall, clean hotel; black people were passing the doors and no white people were in sight. Confidently I entered and was surprised to see a white clerk behind the desk. I hesitated.

"I'd like a room," I said.

"Not here," he said.

"But isn't this Harlem?" I asked.

"Yes, but this hotel is for white only," he said.

"Where is a hotel for colored?"

"You might try ~~the~~ Y," he said.

Half an hour later I found the Negro Young Men's Christian Association, that bulwark of Jim Crowism for young black men, got a room, took a bath, and slept for twelve hours. When I awakened, I did not want to go to the congress. I lay in bed thinking, "I've got to go it alone . . . I've got to learn how again . . ."

I dressed and attended the meeting that was to make the final decision to dissolve the clubs. It started briskly. A New York Communist writer summed up the history of the clubs and made a motion for their dissolution. Debate started and I rose and explained what the clubs had meant to young writers and begged for their continuance. I sat down amid silence. Debate was closed. The vote was called. The room filled with uplifted hands to dissolve. Then came a call for those who disagreed and my hand went up alone. I knew that my stand would be interpreted as one of opposition to the Communist Party, but I thought: "The hell with it."

(To be continued)

THE

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Atlantic

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THE

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**A LETTER TO GOVERNOR DEWEY . Gerald Johnson**

Dewey is a fighter. That we know. But have his lieutenants and the Republican Party back of him the determination to give this country the constructive peace which Harding never gave us?

BOOK PUBLISHING IN RUSSIA . . . Robert Magidoff

NBC'S famous commentator in Moscow has written the inside story of Russian authors and publishers.

WHO REFORMS THE CRIMINAL? Judge John F. Perkins

How much can we do to cure the criminal? How much can we rely on discipline and reason?

THE PRESS CAN STILL BE FREE Ralph McGill

The fighting Editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, one of the great liberals of the South, has this to say about our newspapers.

THE ATLANTIC REPORT on the WORLD TODAY

European Front—Washington Report

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- THEY SHALL NOT HAVE ME Jer
- CROSS CREEK Ma
- WE TOOK TO THE WOODS Lo
- ANGEL MO' AND HER SON: ROLAND
HAYES Ma
- ACCUSTOMED AS I AM Joh
- THE WORLD OF WASHINGTON
IRVING Van
- (Now running)

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**POLICING GERMANY BY AIR . . . Allan A. Michie**

People ask how we can prevent it from happening again. But this time we could have an Allied Air Police that Germany can't fool. Here's how it works.

READING YOUR MIND Dunninger

This "mind reader" has a spectacular effect on his radio audiences. To those who remain skeptical or mystified, he explains that the answer is simple telepathy.

WHAT TO DO WITH BAD BOYS . . . A Symposium

Social workers, psychologists, judges, parents, and the heads of parole boards have tried to reach an agreement about the Individual Treatment of juvenile delinquents.

I TRIED TO BE A COMMUNIST . . . Richard Wright

One of the most eloquent of Negro authors tells the truth of his experience as a writer in the Party ranks.

THE ATLANTIC REPORT on the WORLD TODAY

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1. Two photos of RICHARD WRIGHT with neg. Indexed. Sub'm. by SA [redacted] Obt'd. from DW.
2. An article from the Atlantic Monthly dtd. Aug. 1944 entitled "I tried to be a Communist". See Ser. 39.
3. An article from the Atlantic Monthly dtd. Sept. 1944 entitled "I Tried to be a Communist." See Ser. 39.
4. Eight prints and one neg. of subj. Richard Wright. Indexed.
5. One photo of Richard Wright, 1941. Obt'd. from unknown source. Sub'm. by SA [redacted] 2/16/45. Indexed.

6. [redacted]

7. SI card of subj. See Ser. 44.
 ABOVE RETIRED FROM ENVELOPE RECORDED OCT. 2, 1946

9. 4/17/58. Neg + 5 photos of picture Wright [redacted]

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WRIGHT, R. 33

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Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : SAC, NEW YORK (100-41674)

DATE: 2/20/58

FROM : SA, [REDACTED] b7c

SUBJECT: RICHARD WRIGHT
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WRIGHT, R. 34

20

Letter to the SAC, NY
RE [REDACTED]

b2, b7c

EDWIN SELVIN - Subject testified in relation to this person that he did not remember him as being connected with the Writers' School, but remembers that he was connected with the L.L.O. Subject also testified that he did not know that SELVIN was a Communist.

ROBERT WOOD - Subject testified in relation to this person that, while he, JILLIN, was teaching at Commonwealth College, Mena, Arkansas, the summer of 1937, WOOD was a guest lecturer at this school for about a week. Subject also testified that WOOD was a Communist organizer in the State of Oklahoma.

HOWARD CLAUDE WILLIAMS - Subject testified in relation to this person that he, WILLIAMS, was the Director of the Commonwealth College, Mena, Arkansas, during the summer of 1937.

BERNICE OPPENHEIM WEIN - Subject testified in relation to this person that she is his wife, and that she became a member of the CP at the same time he did, early 1938.

Letter to the SAC, NY
NY [REDACTED]

62,67C

NEWSPAPER GUILD OF NY - Subject testified that he has been a member of this group since its inception in 1933.

MILTON KURTIN - Subject testified that this person and another person, unnamed and now deceased, recruited his wife and himself into the CP during the year 1938. Subject also testified that he attended a "meeting of Communist Party members of the NEWSPAPER GUILD and some other sympathizers, fellow travelers, or trusted person, friends of Party members who would be invited to the meeting". Subject testified that KURTIN was, "on the platform. I believe he was presiding." WHELAN testified that this meeting was held at the Roosevelt Hotel, NY, and that about 50 persons attended.

LEAGUE OF AMERICAN WRITERS - Subject testified that he taught "Labor Journalism" at a "Writers' School", operated by the L.A.W. for two terms of about 10 weeks each in either 1938 or 1939. Subject testified in answer to a question if he knew of any "known Communist connected with the courses at the Writers' School?", that "to the best of my knowledge now, I did not know that any teacher in the school was a Communist, nor did I care, frankly."

MARSHALL KIMMETT - Subject testified in relation to this person that he did not know "whether he was connected with the school. He was connected with the L.A.W., surely." Subject testified that he did not know KIMMETT as a Communist.

RICHARD WRIGHT - Subject testified in relation to this person that he did not know his connection with the Writers' School, but that WRIGHT was connected with L.A.W. Subject testified that he did not know WRIGHT as a Communist.

MYRA PAGE - Subject testified in relation to this person that she was a teacher at the Writers' School. Subject also testified that he does not remember knowing her.

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO: SAC, NEW YORK [REDACTED]

DATE: 11/1/55

FROM: SA [REDACTED]

SUBJECT: [REDACTED]

SM-C

On 7/14/55, Mr. HENRY WILSON testified, under oath, before a public hearing of the US Senate Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and other Internal Security Laws of the Committee of the Judiciary.

A copy of WILSON's testimony before this committee was furnished the NYO as an enclosure with a letter from the Director, FBI, dated 9/1/55. This record has been made a part of the 11 section of subject's file.

This record reflects, in part, the following:

NEW YORK FILES - Subject testified that he has been employed continuously for this paper since February, 1928, with the exception of two years in the military service. Subject also admitted membership in the so-called "Times Group" of the CP from early 1938, to sometime in 1939, for a one year period.

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(12)

WRIGHT, R. 37

STANDARD FORM NO. 64

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : SAC New York (100-41674) (12-16)

DATE: 6/15/55

FROM : SA [REDACTED]

b7C

SUBJECT: Richard Wright
SM-C

**b7C
b7D**

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED 289882
DATE 12/22/88 BY SP1 AJS

100-41674-59

SEARCHED.....	INDEXED.....
SERIALIZED.....	FILED.....
JUN 24 1955	
FBI - NEW YORK	

[Signature]

WRIGHT, R. 38

216



THE FOREIGN SERVICE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
American Embassy
Paris 8, France

~~SECRET~~

Date: February 13, 1959
To: Director, FBI
From: Legat, Paris (100-697)
Subject: RICHARD WRIGHT
SECURITY MATTER - C

yes 11-

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b7D

Re Paris letter 11/21/58. J

[REDACTED]

RUC.

2 - Bureau
1 - Paris
CM
(3)

CLASS. & EXT. BY... 88832 bue
REASON - FCIM II, 1-2.4.2... 1,3
DATE OF REVIEW... 8-25-91
8-25-81

APPROPRIATE AGENCIES
AND FIELD OFFICES
ADVISED BY ROUTING
SLIP(S) OF...
DATE... 6-9-81

Classified by 2040
Exempt from GDS Category
Date of Declassification Indefinite
8-25-77

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
DATE 05-18-81 BY 6113

52 FEB 27 1959

REC-33
FEB 50 5 50 PM '59

100-157464-46

FEB 20 1959

SUBV CONTROL

WRIGHT, R. 39

166

Legal Attache, Paris (100-697)

February 19, 1959

Director, FBI (100-157464)

RICHARD WRIGHT
SECURITY MATTER - C

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

CLASS. & EXT. BY *811*
REASON - FCIM II, 1-2.4.2
DATE OF REVIEW *8-25-91*
8-25-81

Reurlet 11-21-58.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

b1
b7D

1 - Foreign Liaison Unit (route through for review)

NOTE ON YELLOW:

Wright's Security Index card canceled 1948. Self-admitted member of CP approximately 1932 to 1944. Has lived in Paris since 1946. Author of well-known books "Black Boy" and "Native Son" which decry treatment of Negroes in both South and North. Has publicized his break with the CP but alleged to retain some of his previous sympathies.

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
EXCEPT WHERE SHOWN
OTHERWISE

Tolson _____
Belmont _____
Mohr _____
Nease _____
Parsons _____
Rosen _____
Tamm _____
Trotter _____
W.C. Sullivan _____
Tele. Room _____
Holloman _____
Gandy _____

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LEGAT
9 - FEB 20
COMM - FBI

CONFIDENTIAL REC-58

100-157464-47

25 FEB 25 1959

67 MAR 2 - 1959

MAIL ROOM ☐ TELETYPE UNIT ☐

WRIGHT, R. 40



THE FOREIGN SERVICE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

American Embassy
Paris 8, France

Date: February 26, 1959
To: Director, FBI (100-157464)
From: Legal Attache, Paris (100-697)
Subject: RICHARD WRIGHT
SECURITY MATTER - C

ReBulet 2/19/59 and Paris let 2/13/59.

[REDACTED]

RUC

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
EXCEPT WHERE SHOWN
OTHERWISE

2 - Bureau Classified by 1240
1 - Paris exempt from GDS Category 1
(3) :AM Date of Declassification Indefinite
gm/6-9-77

APPROPRIATE AGENCIES
AND FIELD OFFICES
ADVISED BY ROUTING
SLIP(S) OF 2040 by gm
DATE 6-9-77

CLASS. & EXT BY SP8 BTB/bee
REASON - FCIM II, 1-2.4.2
DATE OF REVIEW 8-25-81
REC-91

2 MAR 2 1959

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52 MAR 5 1959

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WRIGHT, R. 4A

169



THE FOREIGN SERVICE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DATE AGENCIES

SLIP (S)
DATE

Declass 1/1/75
2/18/80

American Embassy
Paris 8, France

CONFIDENTIAL

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
EXCEPT WHERE SHOWN
OTHERWISE

Date: February 11, 1960

To: Director, FBI (100-157464)

From: Legat, Paris (100-697)

Subject: RICHARD WRIGHT
SM - C

CLASS. EXT. BY *SP6 bja/25-81*
REASON - FCIM II, 1-2.4.2
DATE OF REVIEW *2/5/82*

DECLASSIFIED BY *SP6 bja/25-81*

Reference Paris Office letter to Director 2/26/59.

On 1/21/60, Headquarters, United States Army Communications Zone Europe (USACOMZEUR), Office of the Director of Security, furnished the Paris Office with a report captioned "Possible Subversives Among US Personnel in France" dated 1/18/60. This report contains a summary of information developed by the above agency in the course of a security investigation of [REDACTED] Bufile [REDACTED]

b7C per Army
b2, b7C

[REDACTED]

b7C
b7D
per Army
b2

[REDACTED]

4 b7C per Army

57 FEB 19 1960

Bureau (1 - New York)

1 - Paris

(4)

CONFIDENTIAL

REC-20

100-157464-49

5 FEB 15 1960

b7C

1-9-67
Xerox made sent to Legat, Paris with Paris let.
12-14-66

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WRIGHT, R. 42

169

XXXXXX
XXXXXX
XXXXXXFEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
FOIPA DELETED PAGE INFORMATION SHEET

1 Page(s) withheld entirely at this location in the file. One or more of the following statements, where indicated, explain this deletion.

- ☒ Deleted under exemption(s) b1 with no segregable material available for release to you.
- ☐ Information pertained only to a third party with no reference to you or the subject of your request.
- ☐ Information pertained only to a third party. Your name is listed in the title only.
- ☒ Document(s) originating with the following government agency(ies) _____, was/were forwarded to them for direct response to you.

_____ Page(s) referred for consultation to the following government agency(ies); _____ as the information originated with them. You will be advised of availability upon return of the material to the FBI.

_____ Page(s) withheld for the following reason(s):

- ☐ For your information: _____

- ☒ The following number is to be used for reference regarding these pages:
100-157464-51

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X DELETED PAGE(S) X
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WRIGHT, R. 47

Richard Wright Dies in Paris; American Negro Author, 52

American Negro author Richard Wright, 52, has died of a heart attack in Paris. Death came to the Mississippi-born writer Mon-

day night. A longtime Paris resident, he is best known for his novels, such as "Black Boy" and "The Outsider," dealing with the problem of the Negro in American society.

He had suffered recently from intestinal trouble and was hospitalized Saturday for treatment.

His latest work, published by Julliard just a few weeks ago, dealt with the theme he spent a lifetime exploring. Titled "Fishbelly," the book traces the impact of American racial attitudes upon the Negro.

Mr. Wright was born near Natchez, Miss., on Sept. 4, 1908. He attended a Seventh Day Adventist school near his home but quit and went to work in Memphis, Tenn., at the age of 15.

From Memphis

From Memphis, he drifted to Chicago, where he worked at odd jobs.

His first writing was done during the depression under the auspices of the Federal Writers Project, first in Chicago in 1935 and then in New York in 1937.

He began contributing articles and stories to small literary magazines. He first attracted national attention with "Uncle Tom's Children" in 1938.

"Native Son," published in 1940, established him as one of the foremost American contemporary authors.

New York Herald
Tribune
European Edition
Paris, France
11/30/60

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED

DATE 8-25-81 BY SP7BJS/lee

WRIGHT, R. 48

100-157464-10

174

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SECRET

May 9, 1963

#14258

REC-13

100-157464-51

**RICHARD NATHANIEL WRIGHT;
EDWARD MARGOLIES**

- 1 - Mr. WC Sullivan
- 1 - Name Check Section
- 1 - Mr. Stefansson

EX-114

[REDACTED]

According to newspaper articles, Richard Wright, who appears to be identical with Richard Nathaniel Wright, born on September 4, 1908, a renowned American Negro author died as a result of a heart attack in Paris, France, on November 29, 1960. (100-157464)

[REDACTED]

1 - London

1 - Foreign Liaison Unit (detached)

NOTE:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Tolson _____
Belmont _____
Mohr _____
Casper _____
Callahan _____
Conrad _____
DeLoach _____
Evans _____
Gale _____
Rosen _____
Sullivan _____
Tavel _____
Trotter _____
Tele. Room _____

MAILED FROM DIVISION FIVE

MAY 10 1963

CLASS. BY SP-8 BJS/bcc

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WRIGHT
49
MAY 16 1963

190-24457-23

Tolson _____
 Boardman _____
 Belmont _____
 Mohr _____
 Nease _____
 Parsons _____
 Rosen _____
 Tamm _____
 Trotter _____
 Clayton _____
 Tele. Room _____
 Holloman _____
 Gandy _____

White Man Is Intrusive

Reviewed by Carl F. Stover

Political Scientist With the Brookings Institution

WHITE MAN, LISTEN! By Richard Wright. Doubleday, \$3.

THOSE WHO need to read this book will probably not do so, because it is written by a Negro. Those who do read it may not like it, especially if they are inclined to feel that everything said about social problems must be constructive. For this is a bitter and vituperative book, "explosive and blatantly unacademic."

Richard Wright comments ardently on white-colored relations in the world, dealing principally with the psychological impact of white men's intrusions on colored peoples. Whether they came as missionaries, businessmen or conquerors, Wright argues, they have helped to undermine the cultures of Africa and Asia.

Thus, the colored man has been alienated from his own, while he is also prevented from becoming a part of the white culture around him. He remains the true

outsider, living in two worlds, and able to believe in neither.

No solutions or plans of action are presented. Wright contends that "we all, deep in our hearts, know exactly what to do, though most of us would rather die than do it." Who can say that he is wrong?

To those familiar with Wright's work, this book will have a familiar, personal ring. Perhaps more than the plight of the world's colored peoples, it reflects his own plight as a talented and sensitive American Negro. Reading it, one is mindful of his closing words in an earlier essay:

"I would hurl words into this darkness and wait for an echo; and if an echo sounded, no matter how faintly, I would send other words to tell, to march, to fight, to create a sense of the hunger for life that grows in us all to keep alive in our hearts a sense of the inexpressibly human."

INDEXED-22

INDEXED EX-117
 62-101087-A
 133 JAN 14 1958

Wash. Post and Times Herald _____
 Wash. News _____
 Wash. Star _____
 N. Y. Herald Tribune _____
 N. Y. Journal-American _____
 N. Y. Mirror _____
 N. Y. Daily News _____
 N. Y. Times _____
 Daily Worker _____
 The Worker _____
 New Leader _____

Date REC 26 1957

62 JAN 15 1958

WRIGHT, R. 50

17

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
DATE 2/14/89 BY SP1AG/yc
(297,812)

(Title) RICHARD WRIGHT

(File No) 100-15433*

1. Photo of subj. (Filed 4-10-58 by krb.)

67C

Disposition:

100-15433-1A

SEARCHED	INDEXED
SERIALIZED	FILED
APR 18 1958	
FBI - WASH. F. O.	

WRIGHT, R
52